

November 7, 2003

The Honorable Barbara Cubin  
Chairwoman  
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee  
1114 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ron Kind  
Ranking Member  
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee  
1406 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members:

The Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Fund was created to clean up the damage unregulated mining did to America before 1977. America still has over \$6 billion in unreclaimed hazardous sites, including 33 million in needed reclamation in Tennessee. These sites are a threat to the safety and quality of life of Americans.

With reauthorization, we can strengthen the AML program so that it can achieve its purpose- cleaning up abandoned mine lands. Weakening the program now would mean that these sites may never be cleaned up. That is wrong.

As a non-primacy state with significant abandoned mine damage, Tennessee is in a unique position. Currently, we are only eligible for a small amount of funding. We usually receive between \$1 and \$1.5 million from the AML fund each year. This is about 4% of what Tennessee needs. At this rate it would take decades to clean up the abandoned coal hazards in Tennessee. Over the last 25 years, only 25% of Tennessee's 243 AML sites have been reclaimed.

This is not a sustainable situation. Tennessee deserves the same guarantee of minimum program funding as other states. We request that the program be changed so that states with abandoned mine reclamation oversight programs that monitor sites and develop reclamation plans be guaranteed minimum funding- regardless of primacy. At this time, this would only affect Tennessee.

At the same time, the current \$2 million minimum is far too low for cleanup projects to occur efficiently. Raising it to \$4 million will exponentially increase the amount of cleanup minimum program states - like Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, Alaska, North Dakota, Maryland and Tennessee- can get done.

Other changes need to be made as well. The AML program should increase the amount of money going to areas where the damage still exists. This means directing more funds to states with abandoned mine lands, not necessary current production. The program also needs to be extended long enough to get the work done. If appropriations remain at their current level, this would be 25 years.

As important as reforms are to the AML program, so is preserving its key elements. The most important of these is that it is self-supporting. In these times of belt-tightening, it has become increasingly difficult to convince Congress to appropriate funds for AML cleanup, though the program supports itself with a fee on mined coal. If that fee is cut and revenues decrease, getting sufficient appropriations from Congress will become impossible, and all states with abandoned mine lands will lose. Do not cut AML's revenue source.

Like now, "Priority 3" sites should still be considered for funding. These sites degrade the quality of our water, our environment, and the quality of life of many Americans.

AML can be an economic development engine. It takes eyesores and makes them community assets. And it creates jobs. The Association of General Contractors estimates that every million in AML moneys creates 59 jobs- meaning reclamation could create over 500,000 jobs in some of America's poorest areas.

AML was created to fix abandoned mine hazards. 25 years later, 3.2 million Americans *still* live within a mile of an unreclaimed abandoned mine. Tennesseans and Americans across the country should not have to still be putting up with these threats to their safety and health.

We encourage the committee to strengthen and reform the Abandoned Mine Land program in the ways outlined above. Let's clean up these hazards, once and for all.

Sincerely,

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Rep. Lincoln Davis  
Member of Congress

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Rep. Bart Gordon  
Member of Congress

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Rep. Jim Cooper  
Member of Congress

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Rep. John Duncan  
Member of Congress

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Rep. Harold Ford  
Member of Congress

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Rep. Bill Jenkins  
Member of Congress

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Rep. John Tanner  
Member of Congress

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Rep. Zach Wamp  
Member of Congress